

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

29 November 1952

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SUBJECT : NIE-78: Estimate of Soviet Intentions Over
the Next Decade

1. On 23 October, the IAC agreed to attempt the coordination of a long-range estimate of Soviet intentions required by the Director of Central Intelligence. (IAC-M-85)

2. In view of the full contributions from the IAC agencies on the NIE-64 series and the extensive discussions held with your representatives during the production of these estimates, we have not requested contributions to NIE-78 in advance of preparing a draft.

3. We have now completed the draft attached which the Board has approved as a basis for attempting inter-agency coordination.

4. This draft is forwarded for your consideration.

5. The time for a meeting of the IAC representatives on the draft will be set at a later date.

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Executive Secretary

Distribution "B"

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28 November 1952

ESTIMATE OF SOVIET INTENTIONS OVER THE FORTHCOMING DECADE

PART I

PROJECTION OF PRESENT TRENDS

The World Power Situation

1. Hostility between the Soviet Bloc and the group of Western nations headed by the US will almost certainly continue through the period of this estimate. The Kremlin will continue to pursue its objective of a Communist world dominated from Moscow. To the Kremlin, a general settlement between the Bloc and the West is impossible; the present enmity must continue because, over the long run, capitalism and communism cannot continue to co-exist. The Communists accept the possibility of periods of stalemate, or even of periods when retreat becomes a tactical necessity for communism. But it would be unsafe to assume that even the most cynical communist would accept a general

settlement with the West, or even a relaxation of tension, except as a temporary tactical maneuver.

2. The struggle between the Soviet bloc and the West is now in a period of stalemate. Neither side appears confident of possessing a sufficient preponderance of power to break the stalemate. Each side will attempt during the next decade to alter the world power situation in its own favor.

3. Clear in its goals and ruthless in its methods, the Soviet bloc possesses well-known advantages in this struggle. It also possesses certain weaknesses, among which are the difficulties of managing so vast a system from the top and the rigidity which results from the concentration of power. We believe that, during the period of this estimate:

- a. The European Satellites will remain firmly under the control of the USSR.
- B. The Chinese Communists will develop a Soviet-type state and society, and will continue to work in close accord with the USSR.
- c. The Bloc economy will expand. It will be able simultaneously to support further capital expansion, increased military production, and increased production of consumers' goods.

- d. The Bloc will acquire a stockpile of atomic, and probably thermomuclear, weapons more than sufficient, if delivered on targets, to destroy the war-making potential of the West.
- e. The USSR will greatly improve its present capacity for delivering these weapons.
- f. The USSR will greatly improve its defenses against air attack.
- g. The Bloc will maintain at least the present level of conventional armaments.

h. The fundamental strength of the West is its belief in the right of all peoples to develop their own cultures and aspirations free of outside interference. This very fact makes the West subject to division and renders difficult the effective operation of a coalition except in times of great mutual danger. During this period, unless there is grave threat of general war, the energies of the West will not be directed toward an increase in power to the same degree as in the Soviet bloc. However, if the principal Western countries maintain the present direction of their policy and pursue that policy with skill and resolution, we believe that:

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- a. The armed forces of the West will markedly increase, especially within the NATO alliance.
- b. Production and productive capacity in the West will increase, but at a slower rate than in the Soviet Bloc. Nevertheless, the West will retain absolute superiority over the Bloc in these respects.
- c. Internal security, morale and anti-Communist sentiment on the whole will improve both within the Western coalition and within those states not allied with either bloc. Some of the latter may enter into closer relations, or even alliance, with the West.

5. The developments noted in the preceding two paragraphs may not occur. In any event they admit of great variation. Actions taken on one side will influence those on the other. The element of will and the element of the unexpected can always alter the course of events. If, however, these developments do occur, the power situation as between the two hostile camps probably will be as follows:

- a. Each will have rectified the most obvious deficiencies in its military power. The USSR will have

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- greatly increased its capabilities in the atomic and thermonuclear field relative to the US. The US will have improved its defensive position at home and it will have improved the capability of its allies to forestall or counter the Soviet capability for acquiring power and influence through local military or political warfare operations.
- b. The Soviet bloc will have moved much closer to the West in economic power and will have reduced its vulnerability to US strategic air power.
- c. The Western powers will have improved their conventional military strength and, by combining that with greater mutual political understanding, will have offset in part the principal elements in the present strength of the Soviet bloc.
- d. As a consequence, the present stalemate, based upon the fact that neither side is confident of possessing a clear preponderance of power, will continue fundamentally unchanged.

Likelihood of Global War

6. Global war can arise by the deliberate intention of either side or through a series of actions and counteractions which neither

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side desired to develop into global war.

7. We believe that, if the above-mentioned trends operate during this period and thus prevent either side from achieving a clear preponderance of power, neither side is likely deliberately to launch global war.

8. The likelihood of global war within the next ten years thus arises mainly from the probability that situations of tension will develop into global war. Korea, Indochina, Berlin and Iran are situations of tension existing at present. Others will probably arise.

9. As each side overcomes its most conspicuous vulnerabilities and approaches the peak of peace-time readiness for war, it will probably grow more impatient of the long indeterminateness of the contest and more apprehensive of the other's intentions. Each side will probably grow less cautious and less reluctant to accept grave risks of global war.

10. Despite these considerations, the failure of either side to achieve what it considers a clear preponderance of power will probably make for continued reluctance on both sides to permit the situation to develop into global war.

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PART II

POSSIBLE NEW DEVELOPMENTS

11. The foregoing paragraphs have approached the problem by projecting in a most general way presently discernible trends. However, it is likely that the course of events during the period of this estimate will be largely determined by events at present unforeseeable or by trends which though perceptible now appear of subordinate importance. The following paragraphs will consider some of these events and trends.

Major Alterations in the World Power Situation

12. It is impossible to estimate whether either side will acquire a clear preponderance of military, economic and political strength. It seems probable that the present plans of the Soviet Bloc to increase its strategic stature will be carried to success. The death of Stalin may interrupt this development; it is even possible that Communism may lose its crusading zeal and be content to accept a continuation of the status quo. It would not be safe, however, to expect that the development of Bloc strength will be halted or even slowed during the next decade.

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13. On the other hand, the development of Western strength is likely to be uneven at best, and it could be halted by economic depression, division among the Western powers, or the unwillingness of the Western democracies to continue to accept the burden of the cold war. There is evidence that the Kremlin not only expects the development of Western strength to be halted but also expects that divisions in the West will result in a decisive shift in the world power situation in the favor of the Bloc. The Soviet leaders will undoubtedly adopt a variety of tactical maneuvers to retard the development of Western strength and to promote division within the West. These maneuvers could range from threats of atomic war to proposals designed to relax tension between the East and the West.

14. If the Soviet Bloc should acquire a clear preponderance of power, through sudden technological advance or general improvement in strategic stature or major shifts in power alignments, it would probably be disposed to accept greater risks of global war than under the present situation of uncertainty. It might even deliberately precipitate global war.

15. It is doubtful, however, that Soviet courses of action can be estimated so logically. On the one hand, the Soviet leaders are demonstrably cautious. Their doctrine warns against embarking upon large military adventures without virtual certainty of victory.

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They appear to believe that the West will inevitably weaken and decay. They probably would not regard any stabilization in the West as permanent. In short, whatever the power situation, these considerations may act as deterrents to the deliberate initiation of global war unless the Kremlin leaders believed that (a) the danger to them was immediate and unavoidable, or (b) that their victory would be swift and complete.

16. On the other hand, the Soviet leaders are also demonstrably suspicious of the West. They profess to believe that the West will attack them in a final desperate effort to save the capitalist system. They may misinterpret Western actions. They might precipitate global war because they believed that a Western attack impended and was unavoidable when such was not in fact the case.

Possible New Alignments within or outside the Major Coalitions

17. It is not likely that any strong new power centers capable of significantly altering the nature of the world power situation will develop during this period. However, India aspires to form such a center, and it is possible that by the end of the period under review an Arab-Asian bloc might play a significant role in the East-West struggle.

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18. Nor are there indications that Communist China and the USSR will develop sufficient divergences of interest to weaken the strength of the Soviet bloc. Again, however, the possibility of a break between the two major Communist powers must be recognized. If it did occur, it would profoundly alter the world power situation.

19. It is more likely that powers now within or associated with the Western coalition will so alter their orientation, domestically and externally, as to alter the world power situation. It is unlikely, but possible, that public order and morale in France or Italy will decline to a point where either Communist or ultra-nationalistic elements would come to power. In such a contingency the North Atlantic system would be fundamentally weakened, if not destroyed.

20. West Germany might attain such stature over the next decade as to permit it, under nationalistic leadership, to strive for German unification and the recovery of lost German territories. Under such leadership, a resurgent West Germany might create destructive conflicts within the North Atlantic alliance and might also increase the danger of global war.

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21. As Japanese national power revives, Japan may attempt to establish a balance of power in East Asia by playing off the US, the USSR, and Communist China against each other.

PART III

CONSIDERATIONS OF TIMING

22. If war comes during this decade we believe it will come, not according to plan, but out of situations of tension, out of unexpected shifts in the power situation, out of errors in judgment, or out of misinterpretations by one side of the actions of the other. The danger that war may come in this way is great and will remain great throughout the decade. There is no one time as against any other in which the danger can now be said to be the greatest.

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